DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 088 583 PS 007 119

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TITLE	The Family Day Care Consultant: An Invention of a Strategic Catalyst to Upgrade the Quality of Family Day Care Homes.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Feb 74
NOTE	21p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications Office, Institute for Research on Exceptional Children, University of Illinois, College of Education, 805 West Pennsylvania Ave., Urbana, IL 61801 ($0.50, Catalog #101)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50
DESCRIPTORS	Day Care Services; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Paraprofessional School Personnel; *Preschool Teachers; *Program Descriptions; *Supervisory Training; *Teacher Education; Teacher Recruitment; Teacher Selection

ABSTRACT

The proposed program model suggests an approach for broadening the staffing pattern of Family Day Care Units by training a paraprofessional, the Family Day Care Consultant, to help upgrade the quality of care given to children in day care homes. The consultants, selected primarily for their successful experiences as Family Day Care Mothers, will work under a supervising coordinator. Based in a neighborhood, the consultant will aid Family Day Care Mothers in providing an enriched program for children, serve as a source of crisis intervention and referral, link group day care resources to family day care, facilitate an information flow between users and providers, assess the needs of Family Day Care Mothers, and participate in community activities. The consultant will spend half of her time working in the field and the other half pursuing an AA degree at the University of Minnesota. The suggested program will have a strong interdisciplinary focus and will blend some aspects of Family Studies, Early Childhood Development, and Social Work. (CS)

ED 088583

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THE FAMILY DAY CARE CONSULTANT

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Available from:

Publications Office/Institute for Research on Exceptional Children
College of Education/University of Illinois
805 W. Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801

Price: $.50 Catalog #101

February 1974

PS 007119

THE FAMILY DAY CARE CONSULTANT: AN INVENTION OF A STRATEGIC CATALYST TO UPGRADE THE QUALITY OF FAMILY DAY CARE HOMES

The primary purpose of broadening the staffing pattern of Family Day Care Units to include the Family Day Care Consultant is to upgrade the quality of care given to children in day care homes. A Family Day Care Consultant is a paraprofessional who will spend 50% of time working in the field and 50% time pursuing an AA degree (considered a midcarser level) at the University of Minnesota. The consultants, selected primarily for their successful experiences as Family Day Care Mothers, will work under direct supervision of a coordinator. The program will have a strong interdisciplinary focus and will blend some aspects of Family Studies, Early Childhood Development, and Social Work.

Based in neighborhoods, the consultants will (a) provide a range of direct services to teach Family Day Care Mothers how to stimulate an enriched program for children, (b) serve as sources of crisis intervention and referral, (c) link group day care resources more closely to those of family day care, (d) facilitate the flow of information between users and providers, (e) gather data and assess the emerging needs of Family Day Care Mothers for program development, and (f) undertake some community activities to deal with the problems of children in unlicensed homes.

Background: The Scope of the Problem

Family day care is the principal method of day care for working mothers in low income working class and minority neighborhoods. National statistics reveal that more than 90% of working parents' children under 6 years of age, who are cared for outside of their homes, are placed in family day care situations.

A publication from the Children's Bureau, Child Care Arrangements of Working Mothers in the United States,[1] revealed that care in the family home was the first choice, followed by care in someone else's home, regardless of the children's ages. Relatively few women expected to use day care centers. In a recently completed six-state study[2] (which included the State of Minnesota), the unemployed mothers on AFDC declared the same preference for child care arrangements as average working mothers.

The dimensions of the efforts needed to provide adequate child care arrangements are revealed in figures provided by the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor.[3] In March 1972, 12.7 million mothers were in the work force, an 8-fold increase from 1940. One out of three have children under age 6. (A forecast projects a 32% increase between 1975 and 1985 in the population of mothers in the labor force who have children under age 5.)

How are these children of working parents cared for? Most of the parents are in the lower third economic level. Almost half of the preschool children (in a recent study conducted by the Child Welfare League of America[4]) were cared for in their homes, not quite a third were in day care home situations,

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[1] Seth Low and Pearl C. Spindler, Child Care Arrangements of Working Mothers in the United States (Children's Bureau Publication No. 461). (Washington: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Service, Children's Bureau; and U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Labor Standards Administration, Women's Bureau, 1968), pp. 15-16.

[2] Betty Burnside, "The Employment Potential of AFDC Mothers in Six States." Welfare in Review (DHEW, Social and Rehabilitation Service), July-August 1971, p. 17.

[3] 1970 Census Data (Fourth Count), Employment Characteristics, Minnesota Analysis and Planning System.

[4] Florence A. Ruderman, Child Care and Working Mothers: A Study of Arrangements Made for Daytime Care of Children. (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1968.)

and finally only a little more than 5% were in group day care centers. The remainder were cared for in a variety of arrangements, many of which included being taken care of by the mother while she worked. The proportion of children of working parents who are in licensed family day care homes is estimated to be less than 10%.

One must pause momentarily to note that family day care homes continue to be the preferred resource, despite the mushrooming of day care centers.

Our survey on this question brought out the following observations: flexibility of the Family Day Care situation is the overriding advantage, and this was expressed in the following ways:

1. Family Day Care minimizes the transportation difficulty for low income mothers.
2. It provides some supervision for school age children and permits these children to remain in their own neighborhoods.
3. It permits siblings to remain together.
4. Family Day Care Mothers provide an intimacy that is regarded as not available in Day Care Centers, especially for children under 3 and children who might have some special problems. Parents view individualized attention as the most desirable advantage of family day care.
5. It is less expensive than other alternatives.

A pervasive attitude of distrust in low income communities for <u>institutional</u> day care centers is implied in many responses. The "parking lot" stigma is still attached, generally, to this kind of child care. Informal opinions on the rigidity of centers (inability to handle mild emergencies thus disrupting the working day of mothers), inadequate facilities, crowding, and inadequate staffing are woven into the expressed negative feelings.

Finally, the use of family day care is frequently understood to be an income sharing device, especially where children are placed with relatives or close friends. In our informal exchanges with parents who preferred family day care, many indicated that the financial need of relatives or neighbors played a major role in their choice.

Despite the widespread use of family day care, the quality of this care is shockingly uneven. It ranges from an environment of creative and stimulating warmth to reported situations of neglect and abuse that frequently borders on the criminal. For a vast majority of family day care situations we have no documentation whatsoever, since the estimated number of such licensed falls between 1% and 10%.

A few summary observations on the lack of a support system:

1. While Family Day Care has the greatest use, it has the least quality control. Even in cases of licensed homes, there are limitations, since licensing criteria are primarily concerned only with physical details such as safety and hygiene.

2. There is currently little, if any, provision of supportive services to the licensed family day care mother. In this community, licensed FDC homes are visited perhaps once or twice a year for a routine visit by the overburdened day care staffs of Ramsey and Hennepin County Welfare Departments.

3. There is virtually no quality control over the day care of thousands of children who are informally placed in homes throughout the metropolitan area. Many homes do not have even the minimum protections afforded by licensing.

4. The opportunities for training for the providers of family day care are sparse and often inaccessible.

5. There is a lack of systematic information between the users and providers of family day care. Parents lack sound information on which to base an informed choice for appropriate day care services, and many women providing family day care are unaware of licensing procedures.

Despite these problems, Family Day Care will be accepted, in the forseeable future, as an essential and inevitable component of a comprehensive day care program: to offer parents alternatives, to offer an intimate environment for infants and very young toddlers, to create a supplementary service for school age children, and to deal flexibly with the special needs of both children and their working parents.

As a response to these community needs we have proposed a project that embraces a three-fold development.

1. The use of mass media (TV and radio) to provide education and training in Early Childhood Education with the adjunctive use of group sessions, independent study, and special seminars and workshops that will be delivered directly to the family day care mothers.

2. The establishment of a central and five satellite resource centers to be staffed and stocked in a way to enhance the competencies of the family day care mothers in each neighborhood; provide ongoing consultation and materials for loan, sites for seminars, and group projects in an easily accessible facility; and importantly, to provide a neighborhood base for the Family Day Care Consultant.

3. The development of a new career: The Family Day Care Consultant. This paper is addressed to that aspect of of the project.

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The Challenge

Given the nature of the problems outlined above, the Family Day Care System, it seems to us, must move irresistibly to inventions of staffing in order to ensure some quality.

If the Family Day Care Unit of Ramsey County Welfare Department is at all typical of such enterprises around the country (a cursory review reveals that it is), an overworked staff confines itself only to basic licensing

requirements (which consist of an initial investigation dwelling primarily on safety regulations), one visit a year, and crisis interventions. The meagre resources of the staff cannot be stretched to provide systematic training for the homebound Family Day Care Mothers, to provide consultation on a range of formidable problems, and to sustain the brokerage function between users and providers. Beyond the pervasive issue of securing some handle on quality control over the licensed day care mothers, there is the nagging concern for the thousands of children tucked away in totally unsupervised situations. (According to the 1970 census, there are in Ramsey County over 11,000 working mothers with children under 6. There are however, only 900 licensed day care mothers and 1,3000 group day care facilities.)

The background and experience of the professional staff, moreover, has one major incapacitating feature: in Ramsey County most social workers lack training in early childhood or in family sociology. This is not unusual. Most professional staffs of Family Day Care Units lack an interdisciplinary focus to their training.

The Response

In our project, we propose the introduction of a Family Day Care Consultant, a paraprofessional at a midcareer level (AA degree), whose mission will be to upgrade the quality of care given to children in Family Day Care homes.

The particular consultant that we are, as it were, inventing, is derived from the model described in the paraprofessional literature as "relatively autonomous" i.e., assignment of tasks is made on the basis of the best performer, not on distinctions between professional and paraprofessional activities. This model stresses the uniqueness of abilities of the

paraprofessional and emphasizes a fair degree of independence and high discretion in paraprofessional activity. (Note that the model we propose is not derived from that which selects a set of tasks for the paraprofessional that the professional considers "routine," "demanding less skill," "low level," or "subordinate.") Because both members of our Family Day Care team bring special capabilities to their differentiated tasks, we expect more of a collegial set of relationships to emerge than is the usual pattern in such arrangements. We have deliberately selected a model of a paraprofessional that is expected to operate in a team relationship with the professional, more or less as a peer, not as an underling in a hierarchical structure. It is our contention that the Family Day Care Consultant brings a unique set of capabilities, not usually shared by the professional (e.g. , successful experience as a Family Day Care Mother). She is intended to have the insider's "know-how," the savvy, and an intimate working knowledge of family day care and its strengths, weaknesses, and special problems. She is expected to use this experience to shape a practical, common sense approach to problems which, Family Day Care Mothers tell us, has been notably lacking in the meagre attention they have received from the professional staff.

A Functional Analysis of the Activities of the FDC Consultant

We suggest that the consultants assume these functions or roles:

1. Teacher: includes a range of activities from bringing and demonstrating learning equipment and play to the FDC home to direct interaction with the FDC mother designed to teach her how to influence a positive self-concept and enhance the child's nurturing environment.

2. Consultant: working with FDC mothers to increase their skills and competencies and coping capacities as well as providing help in the legal and fiscal management of the service.

3. Outreach Worker: an active searching out to det ct problems in unlicensed situations and bring licensing to the attention of the community.

4. Broker: assessing the needs of the users and the qualities of the providers and providing appropriate possibilities of match.

5. Bridge: assuming a variety of linkage activities, primarily among users, providers, the FDC agency, the Resource Centers, and the administrative staff of the project. (As a Bridge, consultants may of course get walked on by all sides, a paraprofessional hazard.)

6. Data Gatherer: gathering information from case data, statistical reports, and related sources of community information and reporting it to appropriate persons for program development and evaluation.

7. Direct Supportive Services: this includes the supportive roles to users and providers which range from listening for simple morale purposes to direct intervention when crises demand it.

The Recruitment and Selection Process[5]

Widespread publicity was given to the 10 positions that would be opened to Family Day Care Motherswith a precise description of the nature of the work-study arrangement that would lead to an AA degree. An advisory committee developed the attached set of criteria. The committee was composed of representatives from Early Childhood Development, the professional staff of the Family Day Care Unit, family day care mothers, minority representations, and two other disciplines which have taken an interest in the project: Social Work and Family Studies. A process of

[5] See suggested Criteria for Selection of the Family Day Care Consultant, appended.

self-selection was then initiated. Primarily, this involved giving precise information on what would be expected of someone in the position, and specific information on the demanding nature of the tasks, responsibilities, and possibilities involved in this opportunity. This, in fact, narrowed the field considerably (from over 100 applications to 27). The process was further refined when all the Family Day Care Mothers who remained in the running were invited to a coffee party, in order to have some interchange with the selection committee. At this meeting, even more detail was given. Questions and answers qualified even further the particular nature of the family day care consultant roles, as we saw them, and the dimensions of the development of this aspect of our program. Finally, 23 mothers expressed an interest in being interviewed. Consistent questions[6] were proposed to the interviewees and their responses, along with some background information and references from family day care mothers, composed the core basis for making selections.

The screening committee was a diverse group, reflecting the various constituencies that have a strong interest in this staffing pattern. The group included a representative from the Family Day Care Unit, university representation, community representation (which included minority representation), the project director, and three Family Day Care Mothers.

Out of the 10 family day care consultants chosen, 9 had their high school diploma or equivalency, although this was not a requirement. (This probably relates to the fact that Minnesota has the highest number of graduates in its population.) Indeed, to our surprise, most of these Family

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[6] Suggested Questions for Selection Committee, appended.

Day Care Mothers selected had some college background, varying from those who had taken a few extension courses in supplementary Head Start Training to some who had had a systematic experience in training to be a nursery school teacher. Of the 10, 3 are minority persons. Generally, they represent the diversity one sees in Family Day Care Mothers; ranging from suburban, rather middle class women, to women with a strong lower economic working poor background.

Competencies as Training Objectives for the Family Day Care Consultants

From an extensive assessment of needs[7] process, we have summoned a fairly clear picture of the most pressing problems of the three major constituencies engaged in this resource.

From the Family Day Care Mothers: A set of conflicts emerging from confusion of rôle (an extension of the parent? substitute? neutral caretaker?); severe behavioral problems and lack of understanding of dynamics and coping techniques in management; battered children; a range of difficulties with parents (from immature single heads of households to children caught in the stresses of family break-up); conflicting standards of childrearing; ethical problems of confidential information.

These items are by no means exhaustive in an inventory that had a bewildering variety of troubling and perplexing problems.

From the Professional Staff: the need for neighborhood workers to deliver direct services and feedback for program development; some ideas on how to alert the community to the problems of unlicensed homes.

From the Users: information, awareness, and consumer guides on how to select this resource, as well as help on alternative placements when appropriate.

[7] See Suggested Assignment for TV Course Participants, appended.

From this assessment we view the consultant, at this time in program development, as one requiring some selected competencies derived from three disciplines: Social Work, Early Childhood, and Family Studies. Broadly speaking, from Social Work we would borrow an understanding of how individuals function in a social environment and the intervention techniques one can master in the helping process; from Early Childhood, an understanding of how children grow, learn, and play and the implications of this for the Family Day Care environment; and from Family Studies, patterns of childrearing and changing family structures.

Can we attain our purpose? Despite the obvious complexities, we feel we have headed in the right direction by securing the cooperation of these three departments within the University of Minnesota to participate in the project. We've begun, at least, by using an interdisciplinary staff.

We are presently engaged in drawing up a set of "understandings" which we presume will be the framework for designing curriculum. This is a tentative outline of what we are considering:

1. Understanding the special characteristics of family day care mothers. While family day care mothers are a mixed population with varying demographic profiles, two striking characteristics have come through to us:

    a. There is a profound sense of isolation which most family day care mothers feel as they care for youngsters from sun-up to sundown, very often without any break into the neighborhood or the life of the city. They are generally homebound and suffer from the characteristics of loneliness, touched off by a lack of adult companionship. It is our hunch that this contributes a great deal to the often expressed hostility and resentment they show to the working mothers who leave their children as charges, for in them they somehow see a role to which they wish they could escape.

b. Perhaps linked to the former is a marked loss of self-esteem of family day care mothers. They often refer to themselves as "only babysitters." They present themselves, as a group, as unloved and unloveable. A sense of grievance heavily undertones their exchanges. They do not see their contribution to the care of children as an important community service. One interesting feature is that, since we began our TV program for Family Day Care Mothers, a sense of excitement and improved self-concept prevails. Having an educational program directed to their needs and the attention they receive in the news and elsewhere has already contributed to their growing self-confidence as competent women. The family day care consultants, not so distant from these feelings themselves, can understand this situation; but they must have some self-examination of this in order to understand what behaviors might flow from the phenomena of isolation and self-depreciation.

2. Understanding the patterns of child care of working parents, single heads of households, a diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and the implications of the changing nature of the family.

3. A wide range of understandings that embraces the behavior of children and coping techniques. These are frequently stated in the various competency statements now emerging and we will not restate them here.

The following is a beginning consideration of skills we are observing:

1. Interviewing as a method in the helping process along with one-to-one relationship capabilities.

2. Communication skills with special attention to recording, reporting, and small group dynamics.

3. A knowledge of community resources and how to "broker" them for the users and the providers.

4. The capability of understanding how the concepts of child growth and development relate to the activities in the day care home and to the interactions between family day care mother and child.

5. Applying the knowledge of safety, nutrition, health, and other areas to the family day care situation.

6. Developing diagnostic skills, especially relating to danger signals in maladaptations of child behavior.

7. Developing a range of community organization capabilities that will help to develop an awareness of family day care resources, upgrading the consumer sophistication in purchasing this service, and identifying for the program staff concerns that should be addressed in the development of the project.

8. Developing the capability of providing technical help in management concerns: bookkeeping, taxes, legal questions.

The Training Program for Family Day Care Consultants

This is being developed as a work/study model with the intention that 50% of the consultant's time will be spent out in the field, based in the neighborhood facility of the resource center; and 50% of her time will be spent pursuing an educational goal (an AA degree with the interdisciplinary focus mentioned above). A tentative curriculum is available as our tentative plan for the framework of this portion of the project. It awaits refinement from the participants and a university-community curriculum advisory committee.

Special Features

1. We are planning to do a considerable amount of co-training of the Family Day Care Consultants and the professional staff of the family day care unit, so that the team concept may be developed and reinforced. Activities here will include attendance of the consultants at staff meetings regular reporting procedures on the progress of the project, and opening up the seminars to the family day care staff.

2. The ladder concept is basic to the model under consideration. At the AA degree (considered a midcareer level), we anticipate working with the Civil Service System in order to develop this as part of a new staffing pattern for Ramsey County Welfare Board and the State Department of Public Welfare as a pattern for other county units. Credits earned in supplementary Head Start and other

training programs will be reviewed, and where appropriate will be the base upon which the family day care consultants may build. Other opportunities for work at this level are staffing in day care center operations, special needs, facilities for young children, and community organization efforts in developing programs for family day care. The possibility of moving to a BA level, and beyond to fully professional goals, is an essential concept. Details of the ladder from Family Day Care Mother to full professional development may be worked out.

3. The methodology of the training program is lodged in the proposition that a core curriculum, electives, and related course work will be available through the more conventional sources of education at the University of Minnesota. The use of Special Topics (an accredited device for flexible curriculum initiatives) will enable us to improvise those seminar topics that emerge as the most useful topics of exploration as the projects develop. We also intend to use Independent Study for content that has a major focus on readings; laboratory equipment to acquire refined skills in interviewing techniques and communication skills; special workshops for specific acquisition of knowledge, such as demonstration techniques in the use of play equipment. Seminars fusing the consultants' work in the field with course work within the university will be established.

Management of the Project

A coordinator will supervise the work in the community: advise in the curriculum choices and initiate activities (seminars, individual supervision) to fuse the two. (We have already begun to refer to this person as the "Den Mother;" rather "Person.")

The Family Day Care Consultants, based in the neighborhood Resource Center, will have 50 licensed Day Care Mothers as their initial case load. The level of activity will determine whether or not this should be narrowed.

The consultants will participate in all staff meetings, providing linkages to other aspects of the program.

Conclusion

This suggested project intends to shape a staffing pattern that will not only enhance the quality of direct services to Family Day Care Mothers, but will provide the community with a capable and competent group of persons who will know how to link the resources of family day care and day care centers into a mutual relationship for the benefit of the children of working parents.

We regard the Family Day Care Consultant as an essential but presently missing link in the gaps presented by licensed Family Day Care homes, day care centers, and the vast and somewhat invisible network of haphazard arrangements that are currently made by working parents.

SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF THE FAMILY DAY CARE CONSULTANT

1. Priority will be given to applicants with successful background as a licensed family day care provider. Preferably, a minimum of 2 years' experience will be preferred. Second priority will be given to applicants with a successful background in unlicensed family day care, with other experience in early childhood education/development, or with experience in working with parents and children. The second priority areas will not be considered if sufficiently qualified applicants under priority one are available.

2. Of the 10 consultants, at least 3 shall be of minority race or ethnic group.

3. Although a high school diploma is not required, the consultant shall be capable of satisfactorily completing undergraduate college work (for example, having the potential for developing good reading ability).

4. A reference will be obtained from the County Welfare Department on all applicants who have been or are licensed for family day care.

5. If the applicant has recently provided Family Day Care., references will be obtained from parents who have used the home.

6. If the applicant is not a licensed provider, a reference shall be requested from the most recent employer.

7. A medical statement shall be presented from the applicant's physician certifying she is physically and emotionally capable of performing strenuous work. She must have been examined within the 90-day period prior to application.

8. The consultant shall express intentions of maintaining this job for a minimum of 12 months.

9. Consistency in life patterns surrounding employment in the past will be considered by the selection committee.

10. The job will require having access to a car for daily use.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR SELECTION COMMITTEE

1. How did you happen to get interested in the job of Family Day Care Consultant?

2. In what areas would you be most helpful to other Day Care Mothers?

3. In your experience as a Day Care Mother, what children were the most rewarding? What situation did you find the most difficult?

4. What kinds of activities do you plan with the children under your care?

5. What are your outside activities? To what community organizations do you belong?

6. How does your family feel about your applying for this job?

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENT FOR TV COURSE PARTICIPANTS
(Family Day Care Mothers)

As an aid in evaluating course progress and determining future directions, we should like to ask you to:

1. List five negative behaviors in children under your care which trouble you.

2. List five negative behaviors in parents of the children under your care which trouble you.

3. Describe briefly what you think triggers each of these behaviors.

4. Describe how you came to your conclusions. (How did you make the connection between the negative behavior and what may have caused it?)

Please complete this assignment and bring it with you to your next group meeting or mail it to our office.

Postscript

The Educational Resources Information Center/Early Childhood Education Clearinghouse (ERIC/ECE) is one of a system of 17 clearinghouses sponsored by the National Institute of Education to provide information about current research and developments in the field of education. The clearinghouses, each focusing on a specific area of education (such as early childhood, teacher education, language and linguistics), are located at universities and institutions throughout the United States.

The clearinghouses search systematically to acquire current, significant documents relevant to education. These research studies, speeches, conference proceedings, curriculum guides, and other publications are abstracted, indexed and published in Research in Education (RIE), a monthly journal. RIE is available at libraries, or may be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Another ERIC publication is Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE), a monthly guide to periodical literature which cites articles in more than 560 journals and magazines in the field of education. Articles are indexed by subject, author, and journal contents. CIJE is available at libraries, or by subscription from Macmillan Information, 909 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

The Early Childhood Education Clearinghouse (ERIC/ECE) distributes a quarterly newsletter ($2.00 - 4 issues) which reports on new programs and publications, and RIE documents of special interest. For a complete list of ERIC/ECE Publications, or if you would like to subscribe to the Newsletter write: Publications Office/IREC, College of Education, University of Illinois, 805 West Pennsylvania Avenue, Urbana, Illinois 61801. All orders must be accompanied by check or money order, payable to the University of Illinois. Sorry, we cannot bill.

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